

**Sonja Ferlov Mancoba**  
**Ernest Mancoba**

*Aicon Art Exhibition: September 26 – October 31, 2020*

*Press Preview & V.I.P Reception **by appointment\***: Saturday, September 26, 4pm – 8pm*  
*35 Great Jones St, New York NY 10012*

Aicon Art is delighted to present **Sonja Ferlov Mancoba | Ernest Mancoba**, an important and timely exhibition that considers the creative impulses of two artists that were instrumental in founding the **CoBrA** avant-garde art movement. It will be the first major show in the United States of Sonja Ferlova Mancoba and the second of Ernest Mancoba (following the very successful first solo of the artist at Aicon Gallery in February, 2017). **Sonja Ferlov Mancoba | Ernest Mancoba** is the first exhibition of the two artists since their **Centre Pompidou 2019** show (June 26 to September 29, 2019).

The exhibition juxtaposes a suite of canvases and drawings with a series of inspired sculptures tracing both artists' heritage – Danish and South African respectively – and recording the profound influence they had on each other's work. Aicon Art's show is in generous partnership with Galerie Mikael Andersen, Copenhagen and the Ferlov Mancoba Estate.



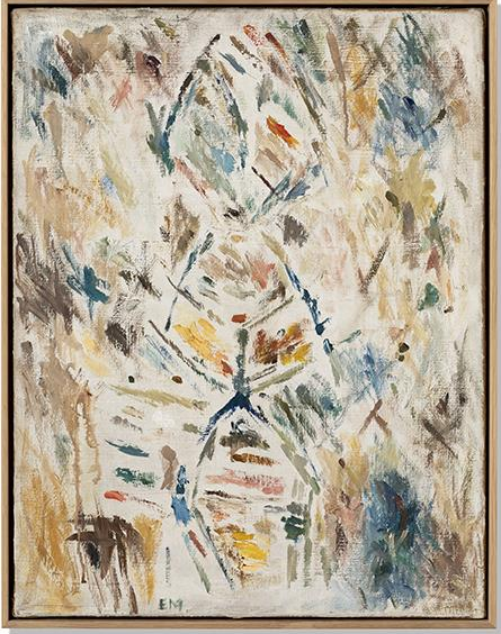
Sonja Ferlova Mancoba, *Guardians of our Inheritance*, 1973  
Bronze, 12 in. height

Sonja Ferlov Mancoba holds a central position in Danish art history. She is primarily associated with the *Linien* - an artistic movement that championed an emancipated and engaged art that connected abstraction and surrealism. *Linien* set down the guidelines for spontaneous abstract creation that later played a major role in the Scandinavian art scene during and after the war.

After completing her first paintings, Ferlov Mancoba turned towards sculpture, experimenting with clay or using objects found in nature. At the crossroads between abstract and figurative forms, her sculptures and drawings were created using a large body of references, from African and Pre-Colombian art to Surrealism. Two distinct directions can be outlined in the artist's sculptural production. One is frontal and centered on the theme of the mask, underlining her inspiration from ethnographic objects – as illustrated in works like *Guardians of our Inheritance* (1973) - the other based on organic and abstract forms, as seen in the work *Growth* (1967-1968). Her work continued to evolve through the 1980s and reveals an abiding interest in architecture. Anthropomorphic, her works unveil a way of seeing the individual as a being that is perpetually evolving, refashioning the body's borders, both in terms of the material and metaphysical, formal and spiritual.

In 1936 she moved to Paris, where in 1942 she married the South African painter Ernest Mancoba. Returning to Denmark in 1947, they were part of Høststudstillingen's CoBrA years, 1948 and 1949. The CoBrA doctrine was comprised in part by a stress on the absolute freedom of form and color with a focus on spontaneity and experiment,

a reaction against the prevailing tenets of Surrealism, and inspiration drawn from children's drawings. The group disbanded in 1951. Discouraged by the break-up of the movement, the couple moved back to Paris in 1961. Ferlov Mancoba's sculptures from 1935 to 1984 are artistic expressions of her view of humanity: "They are human expressions more than art," as she put it. She believed in letting the material speak to her and proceeded without prior plans or finished compositions in mind, and in her strong bronze sculptures you see inspiration that fluctuates between spontaneous art movements and concrete constructivism as well as traditional African art. Statens Museum for Kunst, The National Gallery of Denmark, mounted a large retrospective exhibition of her work of in 2019.



Ernest Mancoba, *Untitled 2*, c.1965  
Oil on canvas, 25.5 x 19.5 in.

Ernest Mancoba's work holds its own amongst the 20th century's preeminent practitioners and proponents of avant-garde Modern art, whether globally or in the West. His eclectic influences spanned the traditional arts of Africa and Oceania, Scandinavian folk art and the free expression of children's artwork. Writing in 2010 the artist and critic Rasheed Araeen summarised Mancoba's contribution:

*Mancoba's importance lies not only in what he himself did in 1939 and 1940, and subsequently, but what seems to be his precognition of what emerged later as CoBrA, Tachisme and Abstract Expressionism. What is extraordinary about Mancoba's achievement is that he is very likely the first artist from the whole colonised world – Africa, Asia, the Americas, Australasia and the Pacific – to enter the central core of modernism at the time when this world, particularly his own country of South Africa, was still struggling under colonialism, and to challenge modernism's historical paradigm on its own terms.*

As his practice reached maturity in the late fifties and early sixties, a primary focus of his work emerged in delicate linear compositions on paper and canvas of version after version of a central totem-like abstracted figure composed with a minimal use of controlled but vibrant lines and subtle splashes of diffused color. As Mancoba himself stated about this focus in his art,

*"In my painting it is difficult to say whether the central form is abstract or not. What I am concerned with, is whether the form can bring to life and transmit, with the strongest effect and by the lightest means possible, the being which has been in me..."*

The artist maintained the importance of spontaneity and the use of one's intuition in the construction of images and in works like, *Untitled 2* (c.1965), the bold color, energetic gesture and commanding line, are evidence of this. In an important suite of the artist's talismanic calligraphic drawings, figuration succumbs entirely to expressionistic groupings of line and color resembling a series of mystical alphabets suffused with life and movement yet rendered with an astounding economy of means.

Mancoba consistently challenged and defied what was expected from him as a Black artist by his European artistic counterparts and scholars, and developed his own uniquely subjective practice that cannot be classified or pigeon-holed as African or "primitive" Modernism. Such a categorization is ill-informed and bears no place in present art historical discourse. After a lifetime of marginalization and mis-categorization, Mancoba's work is finally garnering the critical reevaluation it deserves – offering a global counterpoint to the Eurocentric understanding of Modern art. At the end of apartheid, Mancoba was honored with large retrospectives at the National Gallery in Cape Town and the Museum of Modern Art in Johannesburg. His work has been in major institutional exhibitions at the Tate Britain, Haus der Kunst, Munich, MOMA PS1 in New York and will Documenta 14, Universe in Universe in Kassel and Athens.

Please contact Aicon Art ([newyork@aicongallery.com](mailto:newyork@aicongallery.com)) for more information.

---

At Aicon Art we take the health and well-being of our community, clients, and associates very seriously. Like you, we're closely monitoring the quickly developing effects of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. To help prevent the spread of COVID-19, we will practice social distancing. The gallery is open by appointment at this time.

**\*On Saturday, September 26 from 4pm to 8pm, we will host an open house / champagne reception by appointment. We encourage RSVPs for the same in order to allow us to effectively socially distance and to disinfect surfaces. We do not recommend scheduling an appointment if you or anyone you are in regular contact with, has compromised health at this time.**

**Please email us with your preferred time at [sales@aicongallery.com](mailto:sales@aicongallery.com) in order to RSVP for the event.**

---

We have revitalized our digital presence and we will continue to announce our digital programming - on our Instagram @aiconart and our virtual exhibitions - for the upcoming months. Stay tuned and stay safe.